

What to Tell Children about Thunderstorms and Lightning

The sound of thunder can be especially frightening for young children. Take the "scariness" away by teaching them what to expect during a thunderstorm and how to be safe.

- Postpone outdoor activities if thunderstorms are likely. Many people take shelter from the rain, but most people struck by lightning are not in the rain! Postponing activities is your best way to avoid being caught in a dangerous situation.
- If you see or hear a thunderstorm coming, go inside a sturdy building or car. Sturdy buildings are the safest place to be. If no building is nearby, a hard-topped vehicle will offer some protection. Keep car windows closed and avoid convertibles. Rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide no protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal. Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.
- If you can't get inside, or if you feel your hair stand on end, which means lightning is about to strike, hurry to a low, open space immediately. Crouch down on the balls of your feet, place your hands on your knees and lower your head. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize contact with the ground.
- Practice the "crouch down" position. Show children how to practice squatting low to the ground to be the smallest target possible for lightning in case they get caught outside in a thunderstorm. Show them how to place their hands on their knees and lower their head, crouching on the balls of their feet.
- Stay away from tall things like trees, towers, fences, telephone lines, and power lines. They attract lightning. Never stand underneath a single large tree out in the open, because lightning usually strikes the highest point in an area.
- Stay away from metal things that lightning may strike, such as umbrellas, baseball bats, fishing rods, camping equipment, and bicycles. Lightning is attracted to metal and poles or rods.

- If boating or swimming, get to land immediately. Stay away from rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water and get off the beach. Saturated sand conducts electricity very well. Water is an excellent conductor of electricity. When lightning strikes nearby, the electrical charge can travel through the water. Each year people are killed by nearby lightning strikes while they are in or on the water or on the beach.
- Turn off the air conditioner and television and stay off the phone until the storm is over. Lightning can cause electric appliances, including televisions and telephones, to become dangerous during a thunderstorm.
- Stay away from running water inside the house; avoid washing your hands and taking a bath or shower. Electricity from lightning has been known to come inside through plumbing.
- Keep an eye on the sky. Pay attention to weather clues around you that may warn of imminent danger. Look for darkening skies, flashes of lightning, or increasing wind, which may be signs of an approaching thunderstorm.
- Stay aware of your surroundings. Look for places you might go should severe weather threaten.
- Listen for the sound of thunder. If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be struck by lightning. Go to safe shelter immediately.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Weather Service